



Frightened Of Food

Living With Food Allergies

Imagine what life would be like if you had to constantly check out the ingredients in your favorite foods to make sure your life wasn't in danger after eating even a tiny bit. For some people with severe food allergies, that's become their way of life.

Food allergies cause about 30,000 severe allergic reactions and 150 deaths every year in the United States. They affect nearly 4% of adults and about 7% of children under 4 years old. Several studies show that food allergies are becoming more common.

How do You Become Allergic to Foods?

Food allergies occur if your immune system has an abnormal reaction to food. Normally, your immune system protects you from germs and disease by fighting off the harmful organisms that can make you sick. When your immune system makes a mistake and attacks a harmless substance you eat, it can cause serious, even life-threatening, allergic symptoms.

Food allergies can also cause a sudden and severe allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis brings life-threatening symptoms, which can include difficulty breathing, a drop in blood pressure and narrowing of the airways and wheezing (a whistling sound when you breathe).

Foods that can cause allergies include fish and shellfish such as shrimp, crayfish, lobster and crab; eggs, milk, peanuts, and tree nuts such as walnuts. Peanut and tree nut allergies are the leading causes of anaphylaxis.

Are Food Allergies Hereditary?

Research shows that you're more likely to develop food allergies if several members of your family have allergies. That includes any type of allergy, including hay fever. If you

Symptoms of a food allergy can include:

- Coughing
- Tingling in the mouth
- Skin reactions like hives and itching
- Nausea, vomiting, stomach pain or diarrhea

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Better Safe



WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR FAMILY'S SAFETY

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have 2 allergic parents, you're more likely to develop food allergy than someone with 1 allergic parent.

Some children are actually born allergic to certain foods, whereas others develop food allergies over time. Children are more likely than adults to outgrow allergies to milk, eggs or soy as their digestive tracts mature and their immune systems develop. They don't, however, outgrow allergies to peanuts. But scientists are testing whether individuals might be gradually desensitized to peanuts so that eventually they would not suffer an allergic reaction to them.

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If you have an allergic reaction to a certain food, you may also be allergic to similar foods. This is called cross-reactivity. For example, if you're allergic to shrimp, allergy testing may show that you're also allergic to other seafood.

Treating Food Allergies

The only cure for a food allergy is to avoid that particular food. So if you have any unpleasant reaction to food, see your doctor to find out what's causing the problem. Although many people have bad reactions to certain foods, it may not always be allergy.

To help your physician diagnose and treat you, try to keep a daily diet diary that lists the foods you ate and when you ate them, along with the symptoms you had and when they surfaced.

If you have a food allergy, it's best to prepare for an emergency in case you eat the wrong food by accident. Since allergic reactions to food can be hazardous, experts recommend that people be very cautious. Call 911 if you or someone you know seems to be having an allergic reaction to food.

Physicians usually prescribe an auto-injector device that has epinephrine (adrenaline) for allergy sufferers. Ask your doctor if you need to carry one and learn how to give that shot to yourself if needed.

Dangerous Food Allergy Symptoms

A sudden and severe allergic reaction is called anaphylaxis. Watch out for these life-threatening symptoms and call for help if you see or feel them:

- Difficulty breathing
- Drop in blood pressure
- Rapid heartbeat
- Swollen tongue, throat and other parts of the body
- Narrowing of the airways and wheezing (a whistling sound when you breathe)
- Fainting

